

DIVISION

A QUARTERLY PSYCHOANALYTIC FORUM

REVIEW

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WHEN REALITY INTRUDES
BONANNO | Abbasi

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O N P O E T R Y

Feel Good Gene David LICHTENSTEIN, Editor

In an op-ed piece in the *New York Times Sunday Review*, “The Feel-Good Gene” (March 6, 2015), Richard A. Friedman wrote about the discovery that some people have a genetic variation that tends to immunize them from anxious feelings.¹ The genetic variation leads to the production of a higher than average level of a certain neurotrans-

mitter with the Pinchonesque name of anandamide (*ananda* being the Sanskrit word for bliss). The “bliss chemical” is a natural and endogenous relative of cannabis, the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana. When our bodies produce this chemical we are more blissful and less anxious, and some people are genetically predisposed to produce it more frequently than others.

Friedman suggests that since this genetic variation allows a certain subset of

the population to be less anxious, anxiety itself should be considered primarily a chemically mediated event, that is, “a mental state that has no psychological origin or meaning” (Friedman, 2015). If anxiety is the relative lack of the bliss factor, then why look for subjective causes? As Friedman put it, “some people are prone to be less anxious simply because they won the genetic sweepstakes and randomly got a genetic mutation that has nothing at all to

1. I am grateful to Will Braun, psychoanalyst, for initiating a discussion of this topic and Richard Friedman’s op-ed piece on the Google Group *unbehagen-salon@*.



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Das Unbehagen of Duchamp, Dada, and Psychoanalysis Vanessa SINCLAIR

In 1917, Marcel Duchamp submitted a urinal to the first annual exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists here in New York under the pseudonym R. Mutt. Duchamp was one of the founding members of this organization, along with Walter Arensberg, Katherine Dreier, Man Ray, and Joseph Stella. This society was founded with the intention of providing a platform for individual artists to showcase their work, whether new, experienced, experimental, or avant-garde, and was dedicated to advancing the ideas of independent artists, free of juries, prizes, or ranking of any kind. As long as one paid the entry fee of six dollars, one's work would be shown. The first annual exhibition included over 2,000 works of art. The catalog was organized and the exhibition hung in alphabetical order by the artists' last names to ensure equal treatment. Yet shortly before the opening, the society refused to show Mutt's (Duchamp's) *Fountain*. Apparently the Society of Independent Artists was not as open to new ideas of art as one would have liked to believe. Once Duchamp proved this, he soon resigned from his position as a director.

A similar event occurred in France before Duchamp moved to New York in 1915. In fact, the Society of Independent Artists was modeled after the French Société des Artistes Indépendants, who in 1912 held their twenty-eighth exhibition. Duchamp submitted *Nude Descending a Staircase (No. 2)*, to be hung with the cubist work. Although the cubists were the innovative movement of their time, they developed a strict set of rules for themselves, and while *Nude* contained the fragmentation, synthesis, and muted colors associated with cubism, the movement in the piece was said to be of futurist influence. Duchamp, however, has often stated that he was not aware of the futurist movement at that time. Cubist images were to be static/fixed. Even the title was under attack, being too literary. Duchamp's brothers, Jacques Villon and Raymond Duchamp-Villon, were sent to break the news to Duchamp, who quickly proceeded to pack up his painting and take it home in a cab.

This same work became the most talked-about piece of the Armory Show the following year. The International Exhibition of Modern Art, organized by the Association of American Painters and Sculptors in 1913 and henceforth known as the Armory Show, was the first large-scale exhibition of modern art in America. Images we find iconic today shocked and appalled audiences at the time. Teddy

Roosevelt declared, "This is not art!" (Roosevelt, 1913), while the media likened them to cartoons and child's play. Duchamp's *Nude* was quickly satirized as *The Rude Descending a Staircase (Rush Hour in the Subway)* by J. F. Griswold of the *New York Evening Sun* (Blythe & Powers, 2006, p.41). Viewers were outraged, as they had never seen art of this kind and did not understand how to relate to it. It was called un-American: an attack on cultural mores and religious values. And although the Armory Show included many pieces by well-established and more traditional artists, including Mary Cassatt, Edward Hopper, and James Whistler, the shock and outrage that ensued from works such as Duchamp's *Nude* and Matisse's *Luxury* has forever linked the signifier Armory with the avant-garde, pushing and questioning the boundaries of art as espoused by institutions. Gabrielle Buffet writes of this time, "All of us, young intellectuals of that period, were filled with a violent disgust at the old, narrow security; we were all conscious of the progressive decline of reason and its experience, and alert to the call of another reason, another logic which demanded a different experience and different symbols" (Buffet, 1949, p.255).

The year 1913 was significant in the history of psychoanalysis as well. By this time, Freud and Jung had run the course of their passionate collaboration, which ended with Jung's formal resignation from his position as president of the International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA) in 1914. In the years before World War I, psychoanalysis had begun to secure itself in Europe and North America, with societies established in Vienna (1908), Berlin and Zurich (1910), New York and Munich (1911), and London and Budapest (1913). In 1909, Sigmund Freud made his historic venture to the United States to give a series of lectures at Clark University on invitation from G. Stanley Hall. Accompanied by Jung and Sandor Ferenczi, this trip marked Freud's first and only visit to America. The three men spent several days sightseeing in New York with fellow psychoanalysts, A. A. Brill and Ernst Jones, before traveling to Clark University, where Freud gave a series of lectures detailing the rise and growth of psychoanalysis.

In *Geopsychoanalysis* (1981), Jacques Derrida delineates the impact sociopolitical culture and geography had on psychoanalysis as it took root in different countries throughout the world. As World War I was imminent, many began to flee their homelands. For many artists and

intellectuals, the war produced a collapse of confidence in the rhetoric and principles of the culture of rationality that had prevailed across Europe up to that point. The birth of mechanized warfare, with its massive death tolls, coupled with the totalitarian politics of the time, produced a sense of the fragility of civilization. In his essay "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," Freud discusses the disorientation of modern man, expressing disillusionment with the civilized world, namely, the state, and acknowledging the altered attitude toward death that this, and every war, forces upon its people. "The individual who is not himself a combatant—and so is a cog in the gigantic machine of war—feels bewildered in his orientation, and inhibited in his powers and activities" (Freud, 1915/1957, p.275).

Dada was born in this crisis of disillusionment, its collaborators' wartime experiences greatly influencing their collective body of work. Dada presented a skepticism of society's accepted values and consensus worldview, while embracing new ways of thinking and utilizing new materials and methods, including collage, montage, assemblage, ready-mades, performance, and chance. Quickly shattering certain conceptions about the nature of art, including the appropriate mode of creating, viewing, and experiencing artwork, Dada valued cacophony, dreams, and the violation of syntax as techniques for freeing the unconscious from the domination of reason and tradition. The Dadaists felt that up to this point art had served civilization—their antiart would challenge it. Their radical rethinking of art making was fundamentally a collective achievement born of a moment of moral and intellectual crisis.

The Dadaists made use of new media that allowed for contact between persons across long distances—letters, postcards, journals, magazines—that not only provided important means of sharing but were also incorporated into new forms of artwork. These correspondences between artists and writers in different cities across the globe traced the movement of ideas that transformed art and intellectual thought as it had been known. The aims of the Dada movement were often supranational, emerging amid the racially tinged nationalistic discourse of World War I. A central tenant of Dadaism was antinationalism, fashioning itself as a network with centers in Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, and Paris; a web of connections linking its various contributors, serving as a conduit of ideas and

images. Dada promoted a global identity, and even though Europe and North America contained the city centers of the movement, Dada was as far-reaching as Japan. Buffet describes the atmosphere of the time as being heavily charged as a result of the unusual gathering together of individuals of all nationalities, each with unique talents. "It also turned out to be an exceptionally favorable climate for the development of a certain revolutionary spirit in the domain of the arts and letters which, later on, became crystallized in Europe under the name of Dada" (Buffet, 1938, p.13).

At present, in the psychoanalytic community, a diverse group of psychoanalysts,

group of peers, a series of lateral relationships have been created among those who wish to revitalize the field of psychoanalysis. Free from hierarchical structure and authorizing bodies, the key is to maintain this position, a position akin to the analytic position, and not be swept up in the well-worn cycle of the avant-garde becoming the next institution.

DU considers questions around the event of its own inception, institutional structures, psychoanalytic formation, case presentation, maintenance of the analytic position, and what that would mean for a collective of this sort: a group attempting to exist without leaders. This year the

to begin in the fall. Also concerned with systems and societal constructs outside of the field of psychoanalysis, "Civilization and Its Blisscontents: On Violence and Psychoanalysis," a conference on violence in all of its forms but most notably those inherent in systematization, including medicalization and diagnosis, systemic racism, privilege, and class structure, facilitated by Manya Steinkoler and myself, was held at Fordham University this spring.

Psychoanalysis was once called "the knowledge that disturbed the peace of the world." What happened? Even as early as the time of the surrealists, psychoanalysis was seen by some as yet another method of compartmentalization and categorization. When did free association, begin to be co-opted as a means of organization and normalization? When did the focus shift away from the desire to enable the subject to speak with no intention set upon what the outcome should be? The Dadaists moved away from formal organization and conventional structure by embracing chance, dreams, free association, and automatic writing. Duchamp remained autonomous while playing a key role in several artistic movements over the course of his development. In this vein, DU has the potential to be a vehicle of support for the individual who desires to forge one's own path, whether that path be completely comprised of independent study or utilizing resources to supplement formal training. Practitioners are welcome from every theoretical orientation and may remain a part of any institution they wish. What is encouraged is self-direction, the building of bridges, and fostering of working relationships. As the introduction to modern art forever changed our culture, the way we perceive beauty and push the limits of creativity and innovation, I ask the same of psychoanalysts today: tread your own path, and as Alain Badiou (2000) so eloquently states, "Persevere in the interruption." ■

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philosophers, and graduate students have come together across "national lines" to meet under the signifier Das Unbehagen. Most universities and psychoanalytic institutes in New York City are represented. The inaugural year included meeting with Otto Kernberg and Lewis Aron to discuss psychoanalytic training and development, clinical study days with David Bell and Alain Vanier, and discussions with Simon Critchley and Guy Le Gaufey, among others. Peer supervision, study, and working groups have formed. Individuals are coming together to facilitate lectures, conferences, and publications. Now in its third year, Das Unbehagen (DU) continues to develop as a platform to support independent professionals interested in the study and practice of psychoanalysis, free from the constraints of judge and jury. As a

first of a series of experimental clinical case presentations was held. For "Without History," three prominent psychoanalysts—Muriel Dimon, Patricia Gherovici, and David Lichtenstein—were given process notes of a case without being provided with the analysand's history and were asked to interpret the information however they saw fit. The result was an engaging discussion between panelists and audience members that continued well after the event. Continuing in this vein of maintaining inquisitive dialogue, Gherovici and Jamieson Webster are planning a conference called "Acephalic Communities: *Unbehagen* and Unbelonging," to be held in Philadelphia—the home of the largest Duchamp collection in the world—while Lichtenstein is organizing a series of conversations entitled "Institute/No Institute,"